



# DIOCESAN PRESS SERVICE

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EPISCOPAL CHURCH CENTER • 815 SECOND AVENUE • NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10017

er H. Boyd, Press Officer  
Drew Dearnaley, Assistant Press Officer

Telephone: (212) 867-8400

81101

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## RECONCILIATION IS TASK, IRISH ANGLICANS CLAIM

NEW YORK -- "The work of reconciliation in Ireland based on vision and faith is the task for all our churches," the Anglican Bishop of Down and Dromore in Ulster told a New York audience in late March.

That bishop, Dr. Robert H. A. Eames, is leading a four-man delegation on a ten-day visit with American Church and political leaders to bring home the message of the urgent need for moderate voices to prevail in Ireland and among Ireland's supporters. They undertook the mission at the request of the Church of Ireland General Synod and with the support of Roman Catholic and political leaders in both the Republic of Ireland and the Province of Ulster and to encourage and help broaden the burgeoning Friends of Ireland movement in the states.

In addition to Eames, whose diocese includes the violence-shattered city of Belfast, the group consists of the Rev. Canon William Arlow, an ecumenical specialist who has worked with extremist groups from all factions, the Rev. Houston McKelvey, foreign affairs advisor to the primate and David Bird, a lay leader from the Republic.

Eames set the tone for the visit in a St. Patrick's Day sermon from his Downpatrick cathedral in which he said the time had come "to speak the truth in love." Cautioning against the evil of suspicion, he said: "All the Churches and the vast majority of people have rejected violence as the only means of influencing events. Slowly but surely, we are seeing the growth of a community of all shades of opinion which is isolating the agents of violence."

On that same day, New York Governor Hugh Carey, House Speaker Thomas "Tip" O'Neal and Sens. Edward Kennedy and Daniel Moynihan threw their public support behind the "Friends of Ireland" movement to counter the financial and direct support for extremist factions in Ireland.

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The picture the Church delegation painted a few days later in New York is a complex one. High unemployment and eroding economy reinforce old suspicions. Republican and Loyalist, Catholic and Protestant groups can all point to cases of oppression and discrimination and moves toward compromise -- often even attempts at face-to-face dialogue -- are met with hostility. Eames told a gathering of religious writers their first day in New York that he includes in every Confirmation address the plea: "Don't always think of leaving Northern Ireland."

At the same time, Church programs bring young people together and the isolation of the extremists is creating a climate in which reconciliation -- the traditional communities living side by side and seeking peace -- is seen as a real possibility where it was a vague dream ten years ago, they reported.

The group held a number of meetings with political and religious leaders of the Irish-American community and carried their message to the public in a forum held by the prestigious Council for Religion in International Affairs.

In his address to that group Eames laid out the dimensions of the task: "The overall task of reconciliation in Northern Ireland is to achieve a situation in which two communities, each of them prisoners of their past while dependant on each other in so many ways, can accept each other in peaceful, productive and positive co-existence."

He admitted that, "no lasting political structure which will satisfy each section of the community will ever be possible until this practical aspect of reconciliation is realized. It will involve mutual respect for each other's traditions and ethos. It will involve a much greater degree of sensitivity than has yet been visible. It will require the removal of the grounds of so much which today fosters suspicion and real or imagined fear of each others' intentions. While reconciliation in Northern Ireland terms can be hastened by man's efforts -- it will ultimately be a gift of God.

"Leadership of a quality which involves intimate knowledge of the ordinary person's apprehensions while embodying the Christian gift of life and prophecy does not come easily. It can be recognized today in the examples of individual courage and initiative. It can be seen in the existence of certain institutions which involve people from both communities working for a common social cause. It can be seen in the efforts of small groups to reach across the divide. It can be seen in steady growth of inter-denominational prayer and study groups.

The picture of the Church in Ireland is a very different one from the picture of the Church in the rest of the world. It is a picture of a Church which is not only in a state of decay but also in a state of confusion. The Church in Ireland is a Church which is not only in a state of decay but also in a state of confusion. The Church in Ireland is a Church which is not only in a state of decay but also in a state of confusion.

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"The Charismatic movement is not limited to any one denomination, but has had a profound effect within the Roman Catholic Church. There is evidence of a new willingness on the part of many Christians to see a future which embodies joint response to local community needs.

"The big question for the Churches is whether individual initiative can be matched or even overtaken by corporate action."

After citing a lengthy list of hopeful accomplishments -- the growth of local shared programs, appointment of ecumenical officers, involvement in outside groups, joint efforts to meet pastoral needs -- Eames concluded:

"The earnest longing of the vast majority of Protestants and Roman Catholics in both parts of Ireland is to live in a peaceful community. Wishful thinking, pious hopes and blindness to reality will never achieve this goal.

"The work of reconciliation in Ireland based on vision and faith is the task for all our Churches.

"God has never given us a more urgent and vital task."

The group traveled to Washington where they hoped to meet with other leaders and establish the basis for a continuing conversation and support for the moderate voices that have said, "No More Violence."

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